

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIVISION OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

(TRANSLATION)

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Italian

ASIATIC OFFENDER "666"

To Frs. Floriano Roncari, Egidio Maria Foghin,
Gentile Bad, and to my dear Confrères Giuseppe
Andreatta, Stanislas Rossato, Epifanio Cardin,
who suffered with me for two years under Com-
munism in China, I dedicate these few pages of
memories.

Chronological introduction

I left Genoa on May 22, 1948, arriving at Shanghai on
July 16. I reached Mosimien on September 23, together with
Br. Epifanio and Br. Stanislas.

At the request of Mons. Valentin, Bishop of Kangting,
toward the end of February 1949, I went to Kangting (Tatsienlou)
to study the Chinese language.

On June 4, I returned to Mosimien, where we decided
to build our convent as soon as possible. In fact, on
October 5, 1949, on the land bought by Fr. Placido Albiero,
we laid the foundations of our new convent, on plans by and
under the supervision of Fr. Egidio M. Foghin.

At that time I was requested to go to Loutingkiao to
replace Fr. Heng who was absent; I went there on November 21,
remaining until December 9.

I returned to the leprosarium by the route around the
mountains to the north-east of Mosimien: a trip of some
200 kms. touching Mosimien - Loutingkiao - Wassekeou -
Kangting - Yakiakhen - Mosimien.

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The devil's prophecy: "You shall see the dead flying through the air!"

On December 7, 1949, I was in Loutingkiao when I heard for the first time that the Governor of Sikang had come out in favor of Communism, betraying the province. Since no positive information was available, on December 9, on foot, of course, I set out for Kangting. There was an atmosphere of great tension and, for one reason or another, everyone went about armed. I arrived in Kangting on December 10.

On December 12, 1949, early in the morning, posters were affixed to the walls of buildings in the city proclaiming Governor Liou's allegiance to "ao." There were no incidents in the city. I recall that the Vice Governor invited about forty Chinese and Tibetan chieftains to a conference for the economic improvement of the region. The Bishop, Mons. Valentin, was also invited. I started off a few days later for Mosimien, leaving Kangting perfectly calm.

For the remaining part of December and most of January, life in Mosimien was one excitement after another in view of the rumors of marching armies, partisans in action, brigands bent upon conquering this or that region. Everyone in Mosimien was hiding his earthly possessions or was taking them to the mountains. The men of the village took turns in guarding the mountain passes. On the evening of January 11, 1950, the people of the town were given official orders to "sleep with your clothes on" because of the imminent danger. I saw also some poor people coming from the Lapoukeou valley, carrying their scanty household articles on their shoulders and seeking refuge in Mosimien.

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The threats came from Yunnan, Setchouan and Sikang. There were rumors of Nationalist plans to take back Sikang; of Communist intentions to occupy it militarily; of common brigands, who are always ready to take advantage of any chaotic situation. As usual, the news was often catastrophic, contradictory and unconfirmed. Toward the middle of January, all danger seemed to have passed so far as Mosimien was concerned, and the population regained its composure.

We were busy building our convent, and realizing that the tiles for its roof would have to be transported from the Lamas brickyard to Stangtse, we decided to build an authentic wheelcart. Fr. Pecoraro in Kansting made available to us the iron rims and the axle, and I received orders from our Superior to go there with our mule and bring them to the convent on muleback. In many places the mule path on the Yakiakhe (4,500 m.) was literally a sheet of ice, and even by breaking the ice here and there with a heavy iron pick I could not prevent myself and the mule from falling several times on the treacherous ice.

I remained in Kansting for two days.

The city was in an indescribable state of anxiety and trepidation. Ideas were confused--economically, politically and militarily speaking. Inflation was complete; later, however, the Nationalists relieved it by restoring use of the silver dollar.

I returned to Mosimien on January 21, after an extremely cold night spent, with my eyes wide open, at Ta-k'iao in the Yakiakhen forest. Ours was the first wheelcart ever built in the Mosimien valley.

It was during this period that I noticed an impressive number of strange poor people wandering from one town to another;

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another; they would enter, without much ceremony, the homes of the local people, especially those of Europeans, often pretending to flounder in leaving it and, instead of making for the entrance, trying to gain access to some out-of-the-way room. The streets were unusually busy and people would start out on long trips on the least provocation. In the Yakiakhen forest I met a well-dressed man who told me that he was going to a distant town to present a friend with a parrot; however, as we traveled along, I was surprised to see him carefully questioning my servant, for almost two hours, about the Fathers and the Sisters in the Mosimien valley.

It has always been the custom in Mosimien to stage, on the 18th day of the first moon of the Chinese year, a special procession wherein a man, in the public street, inflicts upon himself a head wound, intending thus to atone for the sins of all mankind. It is said that on this occasion the man is actually possessed by the devil; that is why he is called Mō-koûi (devil or demon) and during the procession he is asked to forecast the future. That particular day I heard him announce: "In the coming months you shall see the dead flying through the air!"

I should like to say that at that very moment the peaceful people of Mosimien began to go through a series of experiences the equal of which they had never seen or imagined before.

A few days before, in the evening, I had met a man who had a deep wound in his head; he was going to Mosimien and had been wounded, so he said, when he was attacked by brigands in the Yakiakhen region.

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Now, when the famous MO-Kouï procession was over, a man was arrested in the market place at Mosimien who was identified as one of these brigands. Without much ado, he was thrown into jail and kept there under heavy guard; later he was subjected to a brutal and violent examination. The poor fellow "had" to confess in accordance with the wishes of the interrogators, and when he disagreed with them, he was badly beaten. A number of relatives and friends of the unlucky brigand wanted to intervene in his behalf and take up his defense before the court; but when they arrived the poor fellow had already died as a result of the severe beating. The incident was followed by disputes, pleas to the courts and threats; finally the man was buried with full honors and all was forgotten.

Soon thereafter, a dozen or so armed men, led by one Yang, made their appearance in Mosimien. They were very young, boisterous men, ready to play the part of fearless thieves or brigands as well as that of heroic soldiers.

They came to the mission and asked whether we needed protection in view of the dangerous times; all they wanted was a bowl of rice to eat and a place to sleep. When we would not accept their offer, they went back to the town and set up camp there. One night, one of these men, evidently with evil intentions, broke into one of the local homes, and when an old lady in the house tried to bar his way, he fired at her. Fortunately, the old lady escaped with a badly wounded hand which needed the medical care of Mr. Stanislas every day for two months.

After this regrettable incident, the brave defenders, fearing the consequences, went away.

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After they had left, some two hundred men of the 24th Army came to the region. They were fairly well clothed and armed. Their commander seemed to be a nice fellow; in fact, he saw to it that many of his men received treatment against the opium habit. Later on we were able to understand the frame of mind of these soldiers: most of them lived in the hope of being able to return to a free life and took any occasion that presented itself to run away. Naturally, the officers had no alternative: the firing squad for the deserters. Many times we attended, helpless, the executions. On the average, some ten men were executed each month, and whenever the ranks became too depleted, the young men of the region were caught in veritable dragnets and forced to replace them. There were also those who joined the unit as volunteers; generally they were maladjusted persons, or persons of loose morals imbued with an authentic desire for adventure. We had the impression of seeing once again the famous "companies of adventure" of our Middle Ages. Theoretically, these men were in the service of the government, from which they even received certain allowances; actually, however, they were quite independent and self-governing; they were soldiers of fortune ready to hoist any flag.

At Chengtu we had seen Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers. Their behavior was perfect and admirable; they could compare favorably with any European army; but the men of the 24th Army we saw in March 1950 in Mosimien were not men that would inspire one with confidence, even granted the benefit of unfortunate circumstances.

Often the officers would meet secretly with the local lordlings, plotting with them, scanning the strength of the various parties and exchanging advice. Every day we watched

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with anxiety the flag of these two hundred soldiers, fearing that it might be replaced at any moment by the Red Star.

Meanwhile, a few hundred nationalists had come down from the north and recaptured Kangting amid the rejoicing of the population. Only a handful of these men, about twenty of them, came as far as Mosimien; according to some, they had come with orders to secure enlistments from the local youth, but according to others, their task was to watch the behavior of the two hundred men of the 24th Army. At that particular time, the nationalists had excellent weapons and were well clothed, but they were short of ammunition. We noticed that no exchange of views took place between them and the men of the 24th Army.

Toward the middle of March 1950 there were rumors to the effect that the Communist army was slowly advancing toward Sikang, bent upon conquering Tibet, as in fact was the case. The meetings between the civilian chieftains of the Mosimien valley and the officers of the 24th Army were more frequent, and a number of trusted men were sent out here and there to seek reliable information. The population fled en masse to the mountains.

Finally we learned that, having occupied Loutingkiao, the Communists were driving toward Kangting to give battle to Yang's bands and were meeting with stubborn resistance in the Wassekeou gorges. But rumor had it that the Communists forced the civilian population to march in front of their regular troops, and that the opposition had withdrawn in order to prevent carnage.

The Nationalists were pleading for ammunition; we saw several planes cruising in the sky over us. Could it be

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that Chiang Kai-shek's planes had missed the location of Kangting?.... The fact is that their attempts to drop supplies were unsuccessful. A quantity of supplies were dropped in Kangting, but when the city was already completely in the hands of the red troops. The Nationalists had withdrawn toward Yunnan.

On the Saturday preceding the Massion Sunday in 1950, we saw the 24th Army, with its Nationalist flag flying in the wind, on its way toward the Yakiakhen Pass. People were heard saying: "They go to help Yang and the Nationalists, against the Communists."

And they went, taking with them a number of hostages because of certain disputes which had arisen during their stay at Mosimien, when the local people had become accustomed to arrests and executions on the slightest provocation.

I shall never forget the impression I received when I discovered, on the execution grounds, that the stains of human blood, with which the ground is soaked, remain there for months and months!

The twenty Nationalists did not go. As far as we knew, they, too, had decided to withdraw toward Yunnan the following day.

Came the next day, Massion Sunday of 1950, and with it the true beginning of our subjection to Mao Tse-tung. It was a bloody day!....

At the Yakiakhen Pass, the men of the 24th Army betrayed their old flag and unfurled the Red Star. Many inhabitants of Kangting had taken refuge on that pass awaiting the end of the fighting for the city of Kangting, and
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when the sudden appearance from behind of two hundred men flying the Communist flag threw them into a state of panic, they abandoned everything and fled toward the wilderness of the mountains and valleys.

It was said at the time that many children were lost in the confusion and fright.

Without firing one single shot, the men of the 24th Army reaped an abundant and excellent booty. Later they retraced their way to Mosimien and set up camp at Lamakeou, staying there until the Communists, who supported them generously with money, ordered them to take off for Chengtu. We learned afterwards that, in the Lan-chan mountains, these men had disappeared because they found no attraction in working for the new masters.

Thus passed the remnant of the 24th Chinese Army!

While this was taking place on the Yakiakhen Pass, bursts of machine-gun fire in the Mosimien valley gave the signal to the Lolos, as agreed, and the twenty Nationalists, who had already begun to withdraw, were pursued relentlessly. Some of them escaped safely, others were saved by the intervention of the chieftain of Mosimien; but eight of them, surrounded in a grove near Otangtse, were ruthlessly slaughtered. The grove was set on fire and, as the men came out of it, they were immediately massacred. Three persons were particularly responsible for the carnage: one Santong, one Centetse, and the Ly chieftain of the village of Lamas.

Various versions were given of the reasons for the mass slaughter. According to some, the twenty Nationalists had become dangerous to the life of certain village chieftains; according to others, the massacre had taken place in order

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for the population to gain the good graces of the Communists. Perhaps there was some truth in both versions.

We of the Catholic Church condemned the occurrence, and Fr. Egidio M. Foghin took the initiative of burying the bodies of the unfortunate Nationalists which were strewn over the hill overlooking the stream and were already being eaten by the vultures and eagles.

The Communists lost no time in expressing their opinion of the carnage, observing that China had been unjustly deprived of eight families. Some of the men who were killed had relatives near Jagaan (Yakow) who made no secret of their indignation and desire for revenge.

Thus, on the Mosimien plateau, the clenched fist was raised in blood as a sign of greetings!

DAYS OF RECEPTION

The manner in which the Communist soldiers presented themselves in Mosimien is interesting. One certain day we had a glimpse of three of them, perhaps sent purposely to explore the situation; a week later we saw the arrival of about one hundred in perfect military formation. They were greeted with all the honors due an army of liberation. The chieftains of the Mosimien valley humbled themselves to fetch hot water for them so that they might bathe, and cooked for them. Then, the soldiers spent that whole evening singing and making merry, and the following morning we found out that they had left early, after plastering the walls of the village houses with inscriptions singing praises to Mao Tse-tung, to universal peace, to world brotherhood, to the protection they would give to aliens, to freedom of religion, etc., etc.; however, on close scrutiny one could

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detect the devil's whiskers in some expressions denying the existence of God. This strange behavior was commented upon with various and different feelings. Many of those who had fled to the mountains returned home when they heard of the situation. Several days went by before some soldiers or Communist Party members, in their typical blue uniform, were again seen in the village. They all came from the province of Shensi. One of them remained in command, while his subordinates were replaced every fifteen or twenty days, so as not to allow them to become friendly with anyone. They spoke freely to everybody, helped the farmers in the fields and tried to explain to them the so-called "social problems," of which they had never heard before. More or less everybody was a small landowner in Mosimien.

One day, intending to settle a dispute, a group of persons went to see the Communist chief, but he sent them off saying: "These matters do not concern me; you have your own chief, go to him." This statement disconcerted the poor fellows, since everyone was convinced that the real chief of the valley was the Communist chief, and that the old village chieftains were nothing more than figureheads remaining there only as a matter of form. But when, later, the Communists set out to collect taxes from each family, this mysterious Communist headman threatened to punish the village chieftain of Mosimien if, within the time limit, everyone in the village had not paid his scot to the new government.

We also received a specific notice: "We Chinese Communists protect the Europeans; but we are aware of the fact that you are friends of the Nationalists and we say to you that, if you want to live in peace, you must end your relations with the Nationalists and must not act as spies!" This

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notice came to us from the Police Office of Loutingkiao.

It was clear that the Chinese as well as Europeans had to submit to the control of the Communist leader, not only in political but also in economic matters. Incoming and outgoing mail was inspected by the Communists. With the greatest nonchalance they would enter any home, those of us Europeans included, without asking permission, and would proceed to conduct a veritable search of the rooms, opening closet doors and pulling out furniture drawers. They would never accept food, or a drink or a smoke. We learned later that they took notes of everything they saw or heard. I learned also that at the market place they showed interest in finding out whence this or that person came, and if anyone came from remote regions in the mountains, he was subjected to an endless series of interrogations.

A blackboard was set up in a public square, and each day a passage from the gospel of Marx would be written on it. Whether or not the people read it was immaterial; the important fact for the Communists was to keep on writing it, for sooner or later someone would read it. Ideas of and plans for social reforms, often in contradiction with one another, were tossed at the unwary population which became enthusiastic at first, then bewildered and, finally, frightened.

The Communists preferred to take quarters here and there, so that they might personally check the financial condition of this or that family. And those who chose to stay with the chieftains of the Mosimien valley had all the air of wardens watching over their wards to prevent their escape.

Whenever they needed something, they would come "kindly" to borrow it, and we knew that this meant, most of the time,

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losing the thing borrowed. They had a special fondness for watches, victrolas, cameras, radio sets....

Fortunately for us, the word "leprosy" scared the life out of them and they would not take anything if we told them that it had been used by the lepers. But, especially in the case of victrolas, which they seemed to want more than anything else, it did not take them long to catch on to the fact that we had purposely broken them or put them out of order.

The Communists were particularly attentive to the principal chieftains of the valley. They questioned them on how the conditions of the population might be improved; they sought their advice on this or that matter, even bestowing upon them offices and honorary titles. For instance, Chief Santong was entrusted with the task of arousing the enthusiasm of the population in the struggle against Tibet. He was later invited to become an officer of the Communist Army, but he declined such an honor with the excuse that he wished to live by working the land like the poor people. He was one of the richest and most powerful chiefs of the valley.

The other chiefs were under the impression that under the Communists all you had to do in order to be left in peace was to lower yourself to working the land. But it was not so. The Communists knew, as everyone did, how great was the power of those native chieftains, especially Santong's. A modern Don Rodrigo, he made use of the lolos to carry out his private designs, and when he had some goal to attain, he would seek it by any and all means. The Communists feared that he might any moment incite the lolos and the population to rebel against them. Thus it was that in early July 1950, Santong, together with Chief Centetse and a few others, was

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invited by the Communists to attend a series of important conferences in the city of Kangting, seat of the province. This was nothing new; similar meetings had been held before and the chieftains had been asked to attend, and the Communists had already recruited a dozen or so farmers (men and women) and had sent them to other cities to attend the Communist schools. Anyway, everyone was convinced that Santong and Centetse were destined to a rapid and brilliant career under the Communists. Instead, it was learned suddenly that, as they arrived at Kangting in their secondary school, the two were arrested. Away from Mosimien, alone, they did not have any power; they were separated and questioned on their real or alleged misdeeds (the people were later told that Santong had 60 murders on his conscience, while Centetse had no less than 40), were beaten up and sent to do hard labor. Other chiefs of the Mosimien region were with them, such as Regolo, who had been in his decline for many years. According to rumors, Regolo was found blameless and was sent, free, back to Mosimien.

Other important manifestations of the Communist program took place in the second half of the year 1950. It was no longer possible to travel freely from one town to another. At the beginning it seemed as though this restriction applied only to the Europeans, but it soon was evident that it covered the Chinese also. A special permit was necessary to go from one place to another; thus, every town became a concentration camp in disguise. It became very difficult to learn what was taking place elsewhere, and each community was cut off from the rest of the world. We noticed that grass was growing on the road leading from Mosimien to Lamas and Kangting!

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The Communists then ordered a house-to-house census, under their control. In order to practice my Chinese, I lived for a few months in our Mosimien residence; when I returned permanently to Otangtse, a patrol of soldiers was sent there to watch my residence. And Otangtse is only three-and-one-half kilometers from Mosimien! Then they requested of each family a financial account covering the last three years: what had been the income and the expenses. Many did not keep records, and in such cases the information was extracted by long questioning. Everything had to be accounted for!

There were cases where someone had, in previous years, been living in another house or another town. In these cases, also, a thorough examination was in order, with the bringing up of old matters which finally ended with the incredible verdict: "Go back where you came from!" It did not matter whether another family was already there; orders were to be obeyed and one family after another had to move, ad infinitum, according to the orders and the whims of the Communists!

A little booth was built in the town's square where all complaints, even anonymous ones, could be submitted. The Communists always stated that they would act only on the basis of just accusations. It was natural, therefore, that every time one found himself involved in some predicament, he would try to find out who might have been his accuser and the cause of his woes. This led to suspicion, hatred, revenge. A few months after the coming of the Communists to power, no one trusted anyone else, no family showed respect for another family or came to its help. Mosimien was already one of Hell's antechambers, and this was only the beginning!

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Disliked as we were because of our foreign correspondence, hindered in our relations with the Bishop in Kangting, and unable to collect any substantial tributes from the Bishop's tenants, our concern over being able to provide for the lepers increased day by day.

By taking advantage of the fact that the Chinese could still move about if they held a permit, which at that time was easy to secure, a Chinese Sister went to Kangting and received from the Bishop a sum of money for the needs of the lepers, since the Communists had stated that they were not going to worry about them. On her return trip, on the eve of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, her mule stumbled while crossing a small bridge and the poor nun fell into the whirling waters of the Lamenuang. Her decayed body was recovered on November 7. Thus, one more grief was added to our anxieties.

Meanwhile, an edict had been issued by the Communists: all weapons were to be reported, under penalty of... (at the beginning nothing was said, but it soon became clear that whoever failed to report his weapons was subject to military execution)! The weapons thus collected were later redistributed to the people--that is to say, to those whom the Communists trusted.

I no longer remember the exact time: in 1935 there already was in Mosimien a Communist who, on the occasion of Mao Tse-tung's passing through the town had the honor of having him for dinner in his home. When the Communist came into power, one day this man was found dead from poisoning. I could not say whether it was murder or suicide.

The situation became worse every day because of the Communists' insistence on poking their noses into public as well as private affairs in order to have a hand in everything

concerning

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concerning the people, not only politically but also economically and socially. Many were those who no longer felt safe, and fled. We figured that there must have been at least fifty of them, especially from the Tzayang area. Those who were caught while fleeing were sent to prison. The only ones who still commanded respect in the valley seemed to be the Lolos. When invited to abandon their customs and usages and completely adapt themselves to everything Chinese, they, who up to that time had been without a leader, held a meeting and elected a king, with great rejoicing amid festivities and parades.

I heard someone say that it was the Communists who wanted the Lolos of Mosimien to have a leader-king; it may even be that this is true, because through this king the Communists later had control over all the lolos of the valley. However, on that occasion everyone was amazed to see that not a single one of the lolos was without a gun! Perhaps it was because of this that the Communists treated them with every respect; but it was only a matter of prudence, for later they, too, had to submit to the laws of sharing the land....

An acknowledgment which at that time was on everyone's lips was this: "THE COMMUNISTS DO NOT KILL!", and in the varied comments it was said that perhaps the good sense of the Chinese would in the end prevail over the Communist spirit and change it. Others considered this fact a sign of prudence: "The Communist fear an irritated population because they are not yet strong enough." It was said that in the Mongkong mountains, where the missionary Fr. Charrier was stationed, and in the Youtong valley, people were still free and willing to fight.

Then one day news came of the war in Korea; people were whispering about the impending arrival of the Nationalist troops. The Mosimien valley was astir, everyone was aware of it and everyone's

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thoughts went back to the days of freedom and peace, so suddenly gone forever. In fact, everyone had forebodings that what had taken place thus far was nothing in comparison with what was yet to come.

Hunger was rampant here and there. The house-to-house census included a detailed inventory of everything one possessed, including such things as chickens. And the people, in silent but eloquent protest, killed a great number of chickens. Taxes were then added to this systematic process of depauperation: first the taxes due the old government, then the new taxes needed by the new rulers.... I saw with my own eyes some families who fed themselves on macerated tree roots.

As to religion, we were not molested until Christmas of 1950. On that occasion the Christians came with unusual zeal. That night I went up to the Little Seminary of Lamas and there I found the Ly or headman of the village of Lamas. He was sad as he saw ominous forebodings in the air. He did not know whether or not to flee. The Communists were already looking for something he could be charged with. After all, he was a good Christian, and the thought of his wife, a pious woman, and his five young children prevailed upon him, and I can see him now as in that holy night he said to me in resignation: "We must have patience! God knows everything!"

[Notation in pen and ink: "Be patient, because here in Northern Italy I have so many things to do each day. Hearty greetings!"]

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THE TRIUMPH OF HATRED

At the beginning, the Communists engaged in casual conversation here and there, on the streets, in the homes, during work in the fields; but little by little everyone understood that it was "necessary" to listen to them. Thus, the famous lectures became the order of the day, or, to say it better, the people's "daily bread." Lately, life was regulated to this point: 5 a.m., rising; then, going to work in groups (for each group of ten workers, one was held responsible for the work of the others) for the whole day; at 7 p.m., lecture until 9 p.m., and often until 11 p.m. Those who wanted to be excused had to have a very good reason. The nightly lectures served to keep control of all the men, who were thus prevented from meeting in conventicles.

The basis of all speeches was, as a general rule, hatred: the hatred of the servant for his master, of the poor for the rich, of the pagan for the Christian, of the Chinese for the European. Very often, but not always, it was possible to tell from the tone of the lecture how things were going. For example, they would say first that foreigners were to be kicked out; then, they would say that, in our work of caring for the lepers, we deserved admiration and could not be replaced! At evening, every little place had its lecture on regularly scheduled subjects. Then, once every two months or so, all the representatives of the people were invited to several days of real retreat with secret lectures. Upon their return they were imbued with renewed enthusiasm.

Toward the end of 1950 the lectures were in full swing and the people had already lost a great deal of the respect one feels toward his masters, his parents, his elders and generally toward all social classes which differ from his own. I recall the case of a young boy, one of our orphans, who had been adopted by a master cabinetmaker and who, after the advent of Communism, talked back to

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his adoptive father and ended by running away from home.

With regard to Sangtong, who was considered a criminal and an exploiter of the people, rumors began to circulate to the effect that the people were by now strong enough to try him and set the hand of justice upon him, if they wanted to do so. Indeed it was not difficult for the Communist leaders, always looking for charges against anyone, to find some persons who wanted Sangtong and others put to death. And so it was decreed!

From Kangting, Sangtong, Centetse and three others were brought back to Mosimien by way of Louting. On the Wokanlin mountain, facing Mosimien, Centetse alighted from his horse and suddenly dived headlong into a deep ravine. To prevent the other four from doing likewise, they were tied together; but shortly thereafter the escorting soldiers ran into two fugitives from Mosimien and, while they were busy arresting them, the four dived resolutely into the ravine, preferring that kind of death to the tortures in the public squares.

In Mosimien the whole population was expecting them and was disappointed. However, there were speeches just the same, replete with insults for the missing men; and there were also volleys of gunfire, as if the men had been there. It was the evening of January 10, 1951.

About February 20, the Under-Prefect of Loutingkiao came to Mosimien on a very confidential mission. When he left, on February 25, the local prisons were literally filled to capacity. We realized then that, the valley having been left without actual leaders, the Communists intended to do away with anyone who might possibly become a leader in case of an insurrection. Among those seized were the ruler and the head of the village of Lamas, both of whom had been tried by the people's court and found "innocent of any guilt."

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After many days of concern over their lot, on March 19 a number of persons, among whom was Ly, the head of the village of Lamas, were brought, barefoot, to a large field. They were tied to poles and the population was invited to show its wrath at them by spitting in their faces, insulting them, slapping them, throwing pails of boiling water at them.... This revolting scene was also witnessed by the children. Finally, at 1:00 p.m., the coup de grace was administered on the nape of the neck to each of the doomed persons. Soon thereafter, the Franciscan Sisters Missionary of Mary, who happened to pass by, ran into a horror-stricken lad who begged them to show him which one was his father, for he wanted to kiss him one last time. It was Ly's little boy; he could no longer recognize his own father, for the death blow on the nape of the neck had badly disfigured the unfortunate man.

Crying was not permitted during the executions because it was looked upon as a sign of disapproval! A woman who was seen crying was sent for 15 days at hard labor! When the executions were over, the dead bodies were left there for their respective relatives to take them and bury them with full ceremony, if they so wished.

The go-ahead signal had been given, and from that day there were executions at least every other week.

Our hearts ached every time we met groups of three, four or more grief-worn women who tried to console one another over the disappearance of their beloved ones. We figured that the number of those who had been executed in public in Mosimien must have been at least thirty.

Fleeing became almost impossible in the winter of 1950-51. At the mountain passes and here and there along the roads and beaten paths the Communists had placed sentries, or agents of the Party, or other trusted persons--men and women. Anyone who passed by was

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stopped and questioned: where was he coming from? where was he going to? what did he have with him? etc., etc. I shall not forget very easily the insolence with which a woman addressed me as I had almost reached the entrance to the Little Seminary of Lamas: "where are you going?" I did not reply and went on; to her angry protests, as I was entering the Seminary, I retorted in Italian: "Go jump into the lake!" Evidently she was satisfied when she saw with her own eyes where I was going.

In order to leave the town it was necessary to have a permit issued by the Party. These road controls had also another purpose: that of preventing the rich (actually, though, everybody) from hiding their treasures in the mountains or elsewhere in their efforts to save them from the rapaciousness of the new masters. "Treasures" meant gold, silver, money, jewels, clothing, opium, food, dry goods, farm tools, weapons; in other words, everything. Everything now belonged to the State, and no one had the right to keep anything for himself.

The military aspect of the struggle kept apace with political procedure: the population would be roused to enthusiasm by the promise that within five years Communism would rule over the entire world. To us Italians they spoke directly: "Soon we shall go to liberate Italy also." In 1950 there was much talk about the war in Tibet and the forthcoming conquest of India. But no further mention was made of India in 1951. However, at least two celebrations were held in rejoicing over the conquest of Tibet. I remember one of the episodes of this war: suddenly the news was spread that the Communist armies in Tibet were in difficulty; mules and horses were dying from hunger, the men were dying from cold. Everyone was forced, in Mosimien also, to turn in a proportioned quantity of firewood and rice straw, to be delivered in all haste to collection centers--the straw for the horses and the firewood to warm the soldiers.

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Of the war in Tibet we knew only whatever rumors circulated among the people: nothing certain and official.

One day, it seemed that the Communists had suffered a severe defeat near Batang. Reinforcements, marching without rest night and day, were sent there within a few days; but then everything returned to normal.

About Korea, it was being said at one time: "The Americans, kneeling down, have asked us for peace. We will give it to them, but we must take advantage of this little peace (armistice) to arm ourselves even more, to buy weapons, cannons, tanks and planes. The Americans are beginning to weaken; one more blow and we shall drive them out of Korea."

On the basis of such talk as this, an office was opened in Mosimien also, as in all the towns of China, to receive voluntary offerings (money, corn, rice) for the arming of China. There was also in the town the office for "World Peace", where everyone was expected to go voluntarily and affix his signature. For all practical purposes, there was no freedom: every office kept a register of, and the Communist Party kept a check on, who had appeared and who had failed to appear, and the consequences were not pleasant for the latter.

Someone asked where they expected to buy the tanks, the guns and the planes, and the reply was: "Even in America."

There was a great deal of talk about building airfields not only in China but also in Tibet. A location frequently mentioned in this connection was Kantse (100°-32° E. Greenwich), and the latest rumors were that the airfield there had been completed. Lately, planes flying at very high altitudes passed over Mosimien quite frequently, and it was said that they were going to Tibet, to the Kantse airfield....

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The contributions in material things were soon followed by those in personal services, with the institution of the voluntary military levy. As many young men as possible were taken from each family, excluding only the sick and the sons of lepers. A little red signboard with the name of the new recruit was given to his family to hang in a prominent place in his home. Actually, the families, when not seen, cried over the departure of their beloved ones as though they felt that these young boys would never come back. The Communists said that these new soldiers would remain in the town; actually, one month or so after their recruitment they were sent to Tibet. Later, some of them returned from Tibet but were sent to other places: some people said against the rebels of Mongkong; others, against the independent Lolos of Ta-leang-chan; still others, to Indochina and to Korea.

The soldiers write home very rarely; that is why their families consider them dead as soon as they leave.

More than 300 of them left the Mosimien valley. But the trouble did not end with the drafting of these men: every once in a while the Communists would "invite" someone to become a truck driver, or to specialize in some branch of the industry, and go to far-away places. And one had better accept those invitations!

Also, the population was continually invited to volunteer its services in the construction of the great military roads. People were given all sorts of promises; but we learned later that they received barely enough food, and that their pay was being withheld from month to month with the greatest of ease while they were risking their lives amid an astonishing waste of explosives used in blasting.

At Loutingkiao, in the course of one evening we heard hundreds of blasts. The shortage of volunteers was made up with forced labor. Of the people of Mosimien, more than one died in these large-scale

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road construction works. The road from Jagaan to Tatsienlou was widened twice its original width, and it was rumored that the Communists intended to extend it to as far as.... Lassa!

Fully realizing the dangers of their deadly program and almost certain that an insurrection was to be expected, the Communists had foreseen everything and made preparations therefor.

First of all they forbade everyone, except those who had special authorization, to possess weapons of any kind. Following this ban, whoever was found in unauthorized possession of weapons was forthwith sentenced to death.

Then, all land immediately adjacent to the roads and surrounding the town was cleared of trees and underbrush, so as to make ambushes impossible.

The postal service was immediately taken over by the police. Many letters and small parcels from my family were confiscated, as were many letters I sent to my confrères. However, they regularly delivered L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO three months after the date of issue. From time to time they would let a letter pass through, in order to give the impression that the postal service was free. The same control, or even worse, prevailed over the mail of the Chinese people, which presented no language difficulty, as did our mail.

The police also controlled all bank operations; therefore, they knew just how much money every person in town received.

Then, there was the box for anonymous reports; it was placed at the entrance to the town, it was kept locked and was always under the watchful eyes of the Party.

Espionage was not greatly developed, but surely existed. One evening Fr. Richard, of the Little Seminary of Lamas, noticed that a man was hiding under his window in order to listen to his conversation; upon being discovered, the man jumped over the garden wall and disappeared.

Mosimien

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Mosimien had no prison house; the Communists built two of them and everyone knew that they made use of torture and third-degree questioning in order to extort confessions, accusations and names of associates. Those who came out of the prison trembled at the thought of what they had seen and refused to talk about it. However, one of them told us, among other things, that in winter time the Communist myrmidons of the law would pour ice-cold water down the prisoners' backs. The prison was dark, smelly, damp, with low ceilings. The relatives of the prisoners were under compulsion to feed them, but before passing food on to the prisoners they had to eat part of it in the presence of the guards, to make sure that it was not poisoned.

On one occasion some of the prisoners succeeded in escaping from the prison and took to the nearby mountains; but hunger forced them to come back. One of them was immediately beheaded and his head was exhibited in the public square; the others were again locked up and subjected to increased hardship.

The local Communist Party had available a special courier service composed of children who, at a moment's notice, were ready to dash to any destination, swiftly and faithfully. By means of this system the Communists are able always to keep in contact with one another.

The office of the Communist Party, which supplied to the town the combined services of our town hall and chief of police, had a staff of some ten persons, more or less; they wore blue suits and took care of themselves quite well, at the expense of the public.

It was they who organized the big lectures and who decided on the subjects to be treated each day at the nightly lectures.

In this kind of set-up the people were unable to move and, in a fatalistic sense, they accepted the whole situation.

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SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Communists divided the people into various categories. Lists of these various categories were made out and posted for public notice. First came the rich landowners with tenants, then the rich without tenants, followed in order by the well-to-do, the mere workers, the poor, the wretched.... Everyone knew his own category as well as that of everyone else.

The first provision to be adopted was a law compelling the landowners to refund to their tenants the deposits they had received from them at the time the tenants were given possession of the land. The manner in which this law was applied was contrary to human principles. Those who had given paper money demanded the refund in silver! Worse yet, they demanded it within an unreasonably short time. It must be pointed out here that in actual practice it was impossible for a landowner to receive even a small part of his tenant's crops--what with an infinity of taxes, which increased automatically as he collected anything from his tenant.

The Communists set up all their offices within the grounds of the Catholic church in Mosimien, also taking over the group of buildings which at one time had housed the Chinese Sisters and the girls' orphanage. It took them quite some time to get settled, and they wandered from building to building. They also set up an office of the tax collector, equipped with a brand new weighing machine, always ready. It was not a dependable machine: perfect for small weights, but inaccurate on heavy weights. Therefore, payment of taxes was always a haphazard affair, usually ending with the taxpayer on the losing side. Taxes are always paid in the form of wheat, corn or rice.

Then came the Draconian laws on sharing the wealth. Representatives of the people, appointed by the Communists, called on the very rich, the rich, and the well-to-do, on the basis of

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specially prepared lists, taking inventory of everything and then taking away all or part of the booty, according to the "people's" verdict rendered by the Communists. All the things confiscated were deposited in a pagoda (Tasasu) which served as a storehouse, and on certain days the Communists distributed them to the population. The large silver coins, however, were retained and turned in to the government; in fact, there was an order to withdraw them from circulation and turn them in to the bank in exchange for Communist paper currency. It was said at that time that all that silver was earmarked for Russia to pay for armaments and economic aid. Hiding anything was considered stealing and was severely punished, as was anyone who destroyed anything. The government owned all things; therefore, hiding something amounted to stealing it; destroying it amounted to damaging government property.

Many were those who, having suddenly become paupers after having worked hard all their lives, committed suicide. We estimated that over twenty such cases occurred within a few months.

All those who came into dispute with the authorities, or who were deemed "unjust," "oppressors of the people," or "exploiters of the people," etc., were committed to public trial and subjected to insult, beating and torture.

The guilty person would be placed, in a kneeling position, in the middle of the public square and all those who had a real or alleged grievance against him would come in turn in front of him and would charge him with his misdeeds, after which they would spit at him, beat him and mistreat him. If he had been granted that much, the culprit could answer with politeness and humility, but as to the rest, he was not permitted to react in any way. A Communist leader supervised the proceedings and saw to it that everything went along nicely. Only the allegedly injured parties had the right to give vent to their feelings; the others could not, unless requested to do so. There was a graduated scale of mistreatment, its degree

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depending upon the accused person, the mood of the public, the supervising Communist leader, and particularly the nature of the charges.

Generally, the Communist leaders are ruthless while gathering evidence, whereas in public they appear to be quite moderate persons. Fakers!

In some cases the mistreatment was inhumanly cruel. A poor devil went through the torture of having bamboo splinters stuck under his fingernails.... Many were those who died as the result of severe beating. I recall one Si-hai-kin, who, coming from the trial, fell to the ground right in front of our electric power station and died. The Communists promptly stated: "We did not kill him!"

And all this went on while public announcements were repeatedly being made of laws forbidding "beatings" and allowing one to justify his own actions.....! We always found this duplicity between "government" law and Communist "practice," noting that the ruling power is really in the hands of the party.

These people's trials also brought a wave of suicides, as had been the case with the sharing of the wealth. Entire families were wiped out by this system in a very short time.

The political, military and social strife took such violent forms from Christmas 1950 to Easter 1951 that there was almost no family left which had not suffered death, or imprisonment, or forcible military service, or disastrous loss of property. Tears were running in torrents.

The institution of the family had lost its importance: the men who were still available were always under party obligations; they would be called to work on collective projects, or to attend lectures, or to participate in plunderings of homes, or to arrest their former friends--all of which kept them always away from home.

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At times they returned home in the evening just long enough to eat a bite, then they would leave again in a hurry.

People worked for fear of not having enough to pay the taxes. The women, too, had to work in order to make up for the many hours lost by the men in satisfying the foolish demands of party life.

The Christians soon found themselves faced by a grave dilemma: either to obey or to oppose the Communists. In preparing the lists of peasants who were to pillage the property of this or that rich person, the Communists purposely included the names of a few Christians. These would come to us for advice: "We do not wish to steal," they would say, "but what can we do? If we refuse to go, we will be treated as friends of the enemies of the people!" And so it was in many other cases.

A few of them succeeded, in a nice way, in being excused; many of them, however, did go, and in the division of the loot there were those who experienced a feeling of satisfaction. But there were also those who, deep in their hearts, felt that they should, as soon as possible, return to their legitimate owners what was not theirs.

But these are exactly the things Communism strives for: sharing the wealth; trials by people's courts; capital punishment; keeping the men as long as possible away from their families; to have as many persons as possible involved in the misdeeds of Communism; to destroy family love; to make the masses aware of their brutal strength which recognizes no reason, no nobility, no honest wealth.

In the course of a few months we witnessed some amazing changes of heart. But Mosimien, too, did not go without the classical Communist purges. At the beginning the Communists even made use of persons with a very bad reputation; then it was learned that this one had been expelled from the party and that one had fallen into disgrace. In Lamas, a newcomer into the Communist Party was put to death on the strength of charges, brought by other Communists, that he had taken advantage of his office to steal. Individually, the

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Communists are persons that can be dealt with; but as soon as you have to deal with two of them together, one fears the other and both become unyielding. The Communists are unjust by nature; but if one of them is officially accused by another of being unjust, or of seeing things in disagreement with the leaders' points of view, then they become relentless. He is punished without mercy!

Within a few months every social problem had been solved! Everybody was a servant of the Government, which was the absolute master of everyone and everything. Orders and counter-orders were accepted without complaint. And with the same indifference, or, to put it better, a sense of "fatalism," the people waited for the long-heralded sharing of the land, although it was actually already under way since the Communists had arbitrarily taken land away here and given it away there according to their own particular sense of justice. Lastly, I want to mention the case of Mr. Sie, our neighbor. Having understood the situation, he donated almost all his lands to his neighbors...perhaps in tacit agreement with them.

THE RELIGIOUS STRUGGLE

Mao Tse-tung had replaced God in everything; people thought of him and sang his praises, morning, noon and night. To tell the truth, Stalin was not spoken of a great deal. All other religions were being eliminated. Some of the famous pagodas of the area, such as that of Tassu, were converted into warehouses, and the pagan children were taught to take the idols from their homes into the streets and crush them with stones.

Not far from Otangtse, a pagoda was converted into a school and all the idols kept in it for veneration were smashed and thrown away. The bonzes were dismissed and ordered to return to their families and go to work in the fields.

We hoped that some substantial change for the better might take place before the time set by the Communists for the complete

eradication

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eradication of the Catholic religion (three years); meanwhile, all of us, except Fr. Egidio M. Foghin and Fr. Stanislaus, who remained in Mosimien, one as pastor and the other as male nurse, settled in the leprosarium and set up temporary offices there.

The Communists were "scared stiff" of the leprosarium, and this permitted us to live in relative peace. We had undertaken the building of a new convent in Otangtee. We felt the need for it because the old Chinese house which we had been using as living quarters no longer offered any protection against rain and the elements and was in danger of collapsing, since all its beams were rotten; also, our community had increased in number and we were never able to have the whole family together on some occasion. First we took care of the lepers, of the Sisters' Convent, of the church... and now, after twenty years, we also thought of ourselves.

If I am not mistaken, we moved into the new House Convent on November 22, 1960, which was a Saturday.

The new quarters were not completely finished inside, but every day we worked on something. This kept our minds occupied and diverted our thoughts from the reign of terror which had gripped the country. The Communists came often to watch us work as masons, carpenters, painters, farmers. But the Communists feel that even work is a useless thing. If you do not work, you are lazy; if you work, it is because, being rich, you wish to become richer. And if you think that the Communists can be converted by good deeds, you are greatly mistaken: if you are a scoundrel, they broadcast it to the four corners of the earth; if you are a saintly person, they maintain that you are a criminal in silk gloves. Against the Communists there is but one double-edged and extreme remedy: to pray and to fight, putting into the fight all our spiritual and physical strength, even our very blood, without compromising!

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The Communist leaders--who at the beginning fooled the people by working in the fields, but now saw no more need for it and passed their time idling in their offices--would teach the little girls of the Catholic church orphanage the Communist songs; then they would send one of the little girls to Fr. Egidio, who had been relegated to a small straw hut built inside the church next to the main entrance, to mock the good Father: "Come, Father, the Communists want you to carry the manure to the fields...! Come!..." and she would run away laughing!

The men who worked for us always drew better pay than anywhere else. Had we committed any injustices, we surely would have been called down, but this never occurred. However, owing to the fact that the Communists were against the Europeans in general--and the Catholic missionaries in particular, whom they fought overtly and covertly,--we found that the men were afraid to work for us because they feared being seen by the Communists. But most of the work had been done by now, and we went on alone!

When the Communists issued the law to the effect that the landowners could not demand any tribute from their tenants, we proceeded to cultivate by ourselves a piece of land, producing, thanks to the Lord, enough food for our needs.

At the time the Communists came to Mosimien, the town had the following institutions: schools (for boys and for girls); orphanages (for boys and for girls); one pharmacy; the convent for the Chinese Sisters; the church; the rectory. Also, there was a house where a number of poor people, old and blind, were kept.

In Otangtse there was the leprosarium, with an ever-increasing number of patients: in 1948, the inmates numbered 150; in 1951, when we left, their number had risen to 292.

Near the village of Lamas there was the Little Seminary in Fr. Richard's charge, with about ten seminarists.

Up

Up to Christmas of 1950, there was a continuous succession of visits and inspections. At the leprosarium, they asked for one list after another until they had us dizzy. They demanded full identification of each inmate, the case history, the treatment given and to be given. Besides, they requested an inventory of the supply of drugs and a list of those of ordinary use. But where they really showed their inner selves was in their constant efforts, at times made with cleverness and at times in the open, to find out where we got the means of keeping our 300 lepers. Who was the manager? Where did his funds come from? Who was giving so much money? Was it the American or the Italian government? Or were they private donations? Did we have any gold hidden in the leprosarium? And so on and so forth ad infinitum.

In order to answer all such questions in the name of us all, in December Fr. Joseph went to see the underprefect in Louting. The Communist official spared neither admonition nor threat, caring little for the real problem facing the leprosarium: the caring for the lepers.

Blood and gold: this was the unsatisfied hunger of the Communists!

Following a polite request, in the fall of 1950 we had to turn over to the Communists one section of the school building, then another room for the collection of the taxes and the storing of wheat and other grains. As was easily to be expected, they ended by taking over almost the entire Mission building, a thing which was finally accomplished in September 1951.

On the feast of the Holy Innocents, by trickery and force they also occupied the church. They displayed the pictures of Mao and Tchoute, they rang the bells and, beaming with joy, they held in it a number of lectures. Then the Father had to clean up the mess they had left and all was as peaceful as before; to put it better, the Father should never oppose them whenever they saw fit to hold other lectures.

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The church in Mosimien was in a dilapidated condition and needed much repair; it was not well suited to the needs of the Communists, because in winter it was difficult to heat and in summer it lacked ventilation, its ceiling being too low. But we found out that the Communist program contained this provision: at least once, Communist lectures and meetings were to be held in every church and chapel, even in private chapels. Their precise objective was the profanation of these sacred places. They also went to the private chapel of the Seminary in Namas, where they not only held lectures but even slept on the altar.

Their oratory was, as expected, directed toward the Americans and toward us, whom they considered the agents of foreign imperialism. Religion was a thing invented by the Europeans; instead of praying, which serves no purpose, it was far better to work.

Toward the middle of January 1951 all of us foreigners, brothers and sisters of the religious communities, were called to Koutingkiao by the police authorities, each of us to give an account, both orally and in writing, of his or her life from birth to date. It seemed a simple matter; instead, the first round of questioning took one full week, then came another round which lasted four days. On this occasion, they held our passports and ordered us not to go around calling on Chinese homes, but to remain always in our own quarters or in the Leprosarium, thus preventing us from carrying out any apostolic work. When we were given this order, an old Communist was visibly pleased and was laughing; Fr. Joseph dared to point out that "anyone is free to believe or not to believe in God." Whereupon the officer in charge (we learned later that he was a Christian) ^{incensed} became/and, with tongue in cheek, retorted: "Your religion spoils the heart of the Chinese people!"

The youngsters were considered insufficiently acquainted with the Chinese language and were somewhat scared during the questioning. We had to use interpreters to give an account of our lives in writing. The Communists gloated over finding some error or discrepancy in our written sheets; in such cases, they would order us to begin all over as a

punishment

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punishment -- and there was a charge for each sheet of paper used.

We returned to Otangtse on January 28. The following day, a herd of madmen broke into the leprosarium. We had been ordered some time back to refund the famous deposit to our tenants, and the Communists had made the rounds exaggerating the value of it.

It should be kept in mind that the leased land belonged to the Vicariate and not to us, and that the meager returns had to be shared by the leprosarium, the schools, the orphans and the Seminary.

We had no money to pay for this truly enormous form of taxation. Our first move was to bring the matter to the attention of the Bishop, with Communist permission. A good old man, a Christian, was sent to Kangting, but on the Yak'akhen mountains his feet became frozen and he ended up in a hospital. Then Mr. Ly, a schoolteacher, went to Kangting; but the money which the Bishop had requested from abroad (with police permission) for the payment of the taxes had not yet arrived at the bank, and it was necessary to wait for it.

In Mesimien, the Communists were furious; they did not intend to wait any longer or listen to any reason. They came to the leprosarium and took Fr. Floriano and Fr. Gentile away with them as hostages. They took them to Tzayang. In all truth, they did not mistreat them, but had them attend a horrible people's trial after which came the warnings: "If you do not make up your mind and pay your taxes, we will do the same to you, or even worse!"

It was then that we decided not to wait for the money from the Vicariate and notified the Communists that we would pay the taxes with whatever we had.

Thus, on February 1, amid a great display of weapons, daggers, spears, and guns, the Communists came and took away everything they deemed more valuable, after putting a ridiculously low price on it. Their booty included blankets, clothes, kitchen utensils, olive oil, salt, corn, etc., etc. Similar operations were conducted at the Mesimien Mission and at the Little Seminary of Lamas.

Only on these conditions we were able to secure the release of the two Fathers. As usual, everything was deposited in the safe eyes

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of the Communist leaders, then it was given to the various tenants according to their stated claims. Naturally, the Communist leaders did not neglect their own interests.....

At first sight it would seem that the people would benefit from these depredations and come out richer; actually, the thought of the things which were ruined because those who took them had no need for them, or because they were thrown here and there without any care, is indeed a heartbreaking experience. To say nothing of all the things which were hidden away and then left there to rot, or of those which in spite of severe penalties, were purposely destroyed by their owners who were about to lose them. And the persons who received part of the "booty" were not considered the owners of it, but simply as "custodians" or "trustees", responsible to the government. It should not be forgotten that the men were very frequently away from their families, traveling here and there, when they were not permanently away after having "joined" the army or the forced-labor gangs. It will be understood, then, that the depredations and redistributions were among the many things designed to fool the people; the things changed place but their real owner did not change, as proved by the fact that the Communists took them back whenever necessary. They kept itemized inventories of everything, and any time they needed something-- a tool, a pig, a horse, etc. -- they just went wherever it was and took it. There were no longer rich people or poor people: there were only "men serving the government in everything", with all their earthly possessions. Thus, social problems no longer existed.

Meanwhile, starvation was in store for us unless the good Christians helped us secretly. The Communists watched every person who brought us something and increased his taxes, arguing: "He has so much that he can give it away to foreigners....!"

We began to worry about the fate of the 300 lepers. Who would provide for them under these conditions? And we saw the inevitable end: hunger would drive them to rebellion; they would run away from the

leproasarium

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leprosarium in search of food, and the Communists would hold us responsible for it. We would end up in prison and the poor lepers would all be killed in the streets.

As our supplies ran lower and lower, the lepers and the community offered their ceaseless prayers to St. Joseph.

In reply to our repeated pleadings, the under-prefect of Louting curtly informed us that he was assuming no responsibility for the lepers and that we would find ourselves in serious difficulty if they left the leprosarium for any reason whatsoever.

Thus our fears seemed to be confirmed. Completely cut off from the rest of the world, we could do nothing but pray and pray some more, together with the lepers.

On the eve of the feast of St. Joseph, March 18, 1951, a letter came from the under-prefect allotting to us a new supply of wheat for the lepers! Eight days later, on the octave of the feast of St. Joseph, another new allotment! Time went by, and on the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, still another allotment!.....

We received only wheat, and the lepers also needed salt, firewood, clothes, etc., etc.; but although this supply of wheat was meager, its quality anything but good (it was mostly moth-eaten), and the lepers needed so many other things, the danger of starvation had been overcome and we saw this as an omen that St. Joseph would take care of the poor lepers even if we no longer could.

OUR AGONY

From time to time, by incredible means, we received news of the other missionaries of the Vicariate of Kengting, and it was news that often disturbed our sleep and our peace.

We learned that in every town, even the smallest village, people were being killed ruthlessly. We learned that in the Youtong valley, and in the Kongkong mountains where Fr. Charrier had his mission, some

7,000 partisans

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7,000 partisans, without help from outside, were withstanding the continuous attacks of the Communist army but were doomed to certain destruction.

We learned that in Kiangting the old and sickly Bishop had been tried by a people's court, had been mistreated and imprisoned. All the Chinese priests, except one, had also been thrown into prison, and the youngest of them was kept in handcuffs night and day. The other foreign missionaries were being held under surveillance in their living quarters often consisting of one or two rooms, and subjected to continuous interrogations and searches.

We learned that all the Christians who wanted to or could defend the bishop and the priests in the public trials had been arrested in advance; in fact, we learned that one Mufenken was publicly insulted by his own son, who accused him of being "a friend of the foreign bishop" and asked for his immediate execution!

With the Bishop in prison and all the Fathers and the better Christians rendered helpless, a Chinese Catholic Church independent ^{was} from Rome/established in Kiangting. Everything was under the direction of the police, and the first objective of this new National Church was nothing else but to seize all the property and institutions of the Vicariate and to ask for the death penalty or expulsion from China for all the foreign missionaries.

One day we learned that Mao Tse-tung had been asked whether it would be advisable to have Mgr. Valentin, the Bishop, executed. He had ^{according} replied affirmatively according to some, and negatively/to others.

We learned also of the despicable methods employed by the Communist police. Some missionary Fathers were made to sit ^{at} a desk on which the ^{of them} policeman had laid their pistols and ammunition; in that position, pictures/ were taken to show that the missionaries were in illegal possession of those weapons!

we were warned

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We were warned also that the police wanted to know the meaning of every piece of paper, every handwritten notation found in the rooms; therefore, it was prudent to destroy every paper, every note, in order to prevent unpleasant situations.

We learned that the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary in Kangting had had their own Via Dolorosa, a long one indeed, and after being dispossessed of everything, including the hospital, they had been banished from China.

Another bit of news which caused us a great deal of sadness was that on the other side of the T'ong-ho River, in the Fulin area not far from us, all the lepers had been massacred and thrown into quicklime pits or set on fire after being soaked with gasoline.

And we knew that all this news, all these rumors, were true, absolutely true. At times the victims themselves sent it to us, in microscopic letters.....

The thought of what was in store for us -- searches, examinations, tortures, prison, and perhaps death -- was a real agony. We were always expecting the Communist police. At night we were not sure whether we would again see the light of day; in the morning we did not know whether we would be still alive at sunset....! Only one thing was in our favor: we were located in a secondary area which was under the jurisdiction of the special police office of Kangting; therefore, the local Communists could not take matters into their own hands and act in accordance with their whims. But even so, our future was uncertain and dark!

When we were called by the police to Douting, in January, to give accounts of our lives, we were given accommodations in a room of Fr. Heng's residence. That residence had been taken over by the Communists and only two rooms had been left for the personal use of Fr. Heng who was, to all purposes, a prisoner of the Communists, continuously watched and controlled.

The room adjacent to ours was the seat of the Communist cell, and

we were

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we were separated from it only by a wood partition.

During the night, there was continuous racket in that room: singing, playing the victrola, laughing, and from time to time an interruption to plan a scheme, hold a trial, or take a decision...

I remember the night of January 27, a Saturday: at about 9 o'clock, singing and record-laying stopped suddenly and everybody was quiet. One by one the Communists (men and women) made their weekly confession, reporting the unusual cases occurred to them and what their behavior had been in each particular case. A man tried to justify his actions and to blame other persons; but another man, surely a Christian, made this remark: "You know well that when you^{go} to confession, you tell the father confessor your own sins and not those of the others....!" Everybody laughed.

The meeting^{was} presided over by an old Communist.

Almost immediately after, we heard a sort of court in session: a young Communist had brought his mother before his leaders and was saying: "She is always scolding me because I want to live as a good Communist. How shall I deal with her?" We heard some voices yelling: "Beat her up, beat her up!" He accused her of smoking opium, but she denied the charges with great courage. Finally we heard the old leader say: "We must not forget that in China the laws of the government order you to respect your parents!" We could not understand how the matter ended. Then the music and the singing started all over again.

Later, the noise stopped again. The leader began to speak: "In these days the rich are beginning to be afraid that they will lose their wealth, and at night they try to hide everything they can, in the houses of friends or up in the mountains. We must watch the streets and the roads, continuously, and find out what the people are carrying with them as they go about." Then came a few comments and remarks, and again the music, which was interrupted abruptly by the appearance of a poor devil who had

been arrested

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been arrested for traveling from one town to another without the required papers. They treated him very harshly, and finally handed him over to a comrade who imprisoned him in a room near ours. When the comrade returned, they asked him: "Did you lock him up?" Upon his affirmative reply, the singing and laughing and sneering were resumed. Then they sat down to a game of cards while singing the Internationale.....

"This is what happened every night," poor Fr. Heng told us.

From that day on we realized that the streets and roads were being watched twice as closely as before. In fact, it was forbidden to carry sealed letters from one town to another, and any such letters had to be opened and shown to anyone who wished to read them. Likewise, it was forbidden to send through the mail a sealed letter within another letter.

There was no doubt that the noose was getting tighter every day, and we tried to resign ourselves to the idea of the violent death that probably awaited us. Fr. Heng used to tell me: "I have no doubt that we shall be killed.... let us hope that they will shoot us. But perhaps they will crush our heads with a rock....!" Then he would be overcome by a feeling of dejection that was heartbreaking. Many a time, while walking along the walls of the leprosarium, I saw myself lined up against the wall and the men of the firing squad pointing their guns at me! And the other members of the community, also, at times in a joking way and at times in all earnestness, tried to become accustomed to the idea of violent death.

Following the procedure they had employed in Kangting, where they had arrested all the more courageous and influential Christians before acting against the Bishop, one day the Communists arrested our proctor in Mesimien and our teacher Ly at Louting. Thus, our Fr. Epidio, the pastor in Mesimien, found himself isolated and like a lamb surrounded by hungry wolves.

Little by little, the Communists had taken over all the Mission's buildings. First the schools were closed, then the orphanages, finally

the Chinese

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the Chinese Sisters were sent back to their original towns here and there, where they were to report to the Communist chieftain and hand him a message of introduction.... This message stated that the bearer was a Catholic Sister, etc., etc. This meant that it was useless to try to move somewhere else and start life anew... the Communist police had its eyes on each one of these sisters and would follow her everywhere.

In the Catholic Mission of Mosimien only a few unfortunates were left, poor old men who, up to that time, had been cared for by Fr. Egidio. Instigated by the Communists, these poor creatures demanded from the Father a "salary" for the services they had rendered to him during so many years. Thus, Fr. Egidio not only found himself in destitution but deeply in debt to those whom he, out of generosity, had fed and kept for many years.... Unable to carry out the ministry of his priesthood, and continuously plagued by endless financial problems, Fr. Egidio saw no other way out than to retire to Otangtse, which he did toward the end of May 1951.

By taking advantage of the freedom granted to him in order to go to the leprosarium, little by little he transferred all his personal belongings to our convent, finally completing the moving operation in June.

Fr. Stanislaus remained in Mosimien with his pharmacy, which was used also by the Communists. There also remained a few old persons, who managed to steal every single thing that was left there.

One day the Communists invited all the old people of the Mosimien valley to go to the "Great National Old Peoples' Home" in the city of Jagaan, which had replaced Kangting as the capital of Sikang. Some of them went, others refused to go, and I do not know how the matter ended.

The Chinese Sisters had always had with them an old Tibetan woman. On their departure, they left to the poor woman a few things and a pig. For the old woman, that pig represented "everything", and she took great care of it and made calculations in her mind.... But one day Fr. Stanislaus found her crying in despair. Without saying even one word to her, the

Communist

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Communist had taken away the pig and killed it. "Go to Jagaan," they told her. But she did not want to go because in that Home the old people were not permitted to pray and to die as Christians!

Meanwhile, something of the same order was taking place in the Little Seminary of Lamas. By pressure and direct or indirect threat, all the seminarists were forced to return to their families. The e, too, yielding to Communist instigation and taking advantage of the persecution of the foreigners, one of the servants demanded an unjust payment of salary before leaving. Only Fr. Richard, M.E.P., remained there together with a truly admirable old man who spent all his time in prayer. How much sadness in that place, once bustling with activity and the source of so much hope! The poor Father could not stand it any longer and he, too, came in June to stay with us at Otangtse, which had become our voluntary but at the same time inevitable concentration camp.

In the Communists, the thirst for blood goes hand in hand with the thirst for gold. They are robbers just as much as they are murderers.

After having accused our poor rector of all sorts of misdeeds and having inflicted upon him various sentences ranging from a few months in prison to death, they came on several occasions to Otangtse with the evident intention of extorting from us what little we still had left, bringing with them the poor man in handcuffs, like a common criminal. The Communists told us: "Your rector must pay 7 tans [£] for taxes; if the Father will pay for him, we promise to free him, but if the Father does not pay, we will kill him."

The alternative was neither logical nor just; but since the Communists had stated their stand for everyone to know, the result was that the people waited to see what the Father would now do for this poor man who had served the Church for such a long time and had helped him out of many a predicament. Even though we were not sure that the Communists would keep their word, we paid the tax (or should I say the ransom) and,

on August 24,

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on August 24, 1951, the proctor left Mosimien to serve a three-year term at hard labor...

At this particular time the Communists were instigating as many persons as they could to demand from us payment of imaginary debts, alleged back salaries, etc. They would repeat: "The Fathers must go away!" and the result was that many simpleminded people were eager to lay their hands on the property left by the Fathers.

Time went by and every day the Communist program was closer to realization; there was nothing left but the famous "sharing of the land." And we had the good fortune to witness this sharing, which was a long and laborious process.

First of all they requested all landowners to turn in the deeds of their lands, then -- so it was said -- all these deeds were burned. Every document pertaining to land owned had to be turned in, under the threat of very severe penalties. Then, all the land was surveyed. They came also to our place; they stuck a little red flag in the middle of the field and proceeded to stretch the lines along the boundaries of our property. The result of the survey was written down on a wooden tablet which was later posted on one of the boundary lines. The survey showed our property to be larger than it actually was. And this was the case with many other fields. Naturally, there were those who protested, and the survey was made over and over, each time with a worse result. I do not recall whether our field was surveyed by 5, or 6, or more different commissions.

The injustice of these commissions was deliberate and preordained by the Communist chieftains. In answer to the usual complaints, one day the Communists came out with the statement that they had the right to survey the land before distribution, and that their findings would be final. Thus, they proceeded to survey all the lands of the valley, and their computations of the size of each property always came out larger than the actual size....,

in order

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in order to increase the yield of the land, to which hypothetical figure was applied the rule that three fourths of the yield were to be turned in to the State and the remaining one fourth was left for the needs of the worker.....

At this point we lost interest in the whole thing, since we realized that we had just about reached the end of our rope.

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On September 21, a dozen or so Communists, men and women, came to the leprosarium accompanied by the chief of police of Kangting. They announced that, in the name of the Government, they were taking over the leprosarium and assuming the responsibility for its operation.

They looked for every possible way to charge us with some misdeed, finding none.

They demanded an inventory of our personal belongings and one of the things which we considered as belonging to "the community". They also demanded a list of all the medicines we had and...exactly how much money was in our hands.

They ordered Fr. Stanislaus immediately to close the pharmacy in Mesimien and to hand over all the medicines, which were then brought to Otangtse, where the Communists had taken over the Sisters' convent.

We were ordered to remain confined in our quarters, and armed guards were posted at the door, night and day, to prevent us from talking to the Chinese or disposing of our personal things.

The lepers were lectured every day and incited to turn against us and demand that we leave the country.

Every morning and evening the lepers had to attend meetings to sing Communist songs, instead of praying as they did before; during the day they had to work....

At first,

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At first, the lectures were held in the courtyard, and then..... in the church, which now was nothing but a public meeting hall, as was to be expected.

They placed together men and women, boys and girls, leaving those who were gravely ill in the most uncomfortable rooms; they forbade the lighting of fires for heating purposes and the keeping of food brought to the lepers by their relatives; they cut down the weekly food ration; they tried to stir up the lepers by bringing up the most outworn and silly matters...

God alone knows how many tears were shed in those days by the poor lepers, who realized that they were doomed to be killed, if not directly, surely indirectly by being deprived of the care they needed.

The head of the Communist commission was a veritable scoundrel; he stole the morphine intended for the lepers and used it himself, taking as much as 80 centigrams a day intravenously. Under the action of the drug, he would stand up in public and launch a tirade against us. When we discovered that he was stealing the morphine, we formally reported him to the Communist police, but we do not know what was the result of our charges.

We had been deprived of every right to be concerned with the lepers, deprived of our personal belongings, and kept always at the disposal of the Communists. We expected to end up in prison. On October 4, 1951, at noon, they interrupted our meal and ordered us to assemble in a room, Brothers and Sisters together. There, the Chief of Police ordered us in the name of the Government to be out of Mosimien by 10 o'clock of the following day.

Only three Sisters and three Priars were ordered to remain and wait for new orders.

In departing, we fully understood that the people loved us and that those who hated us were only the leaders, because such hatred was

a part of their

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a part of their program.

On October 5, at 10:30 a.m., we left under police escort. In saying good-bye to those who were remaining, I heard them say: "Pray for us who perhaps shall die." And the lepers told me: "Please offer the Holy Mass for us when we are dead."

On our way, incredibly large crowds of people came furtively, fearing the police, from every country lane to bid us good-bye. Poor the people, their faces were disfigured by/daily tears and agonies!

Each one of us carried with him, or her, a small valise filled with personal things. We had so many things when we came, and now we had to leave like criminals, with only a few personal effects.... But even if we had been permitted to take more with us, it would have been impractical in view of the long trip and the prospect of having to carry everything ourselves.

At every city we had to fill out identification papers, several times being requested also to make an inventory of everything we had with us.

At every city they searched our valises and our persons. We were kept under close watch and custody at all times and in all places.

In Mosinien and in Loutingkiao we were made to post public notices to the effect that we, barbarians that we were, having to get out of China in 20 days, were serving final notice on anyone who had claims of any kind against us to come forward and submit such claims.....

In Jaganan we were handed our Communist passports, good only for leaving China and to be presented to the local police in all the cities along our way.

Our group consisted of 5 Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary, one Father of the Foreign Missions of Paris, and four of us Franciscans.

The schedule of our trip was as follows:

October 5 - departure at 10:30 a.m., on foot;

" 7 - arrival at Louting, in the evening. Considerable amount of checking

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checking here;

October 9 - departure for Jagaan by truck, in the morning;

- " 10 - arrival at Jagaan, in the evening. Checking by the police;
- " 13 - morning, departure for Chengtu and arrival there in late evening;
- " 14 - early morning, departure for Chungking by stage-coach;
- " 16 - evening, arrival in Chungking. Special questioning here;
- " 19 - evening, boarding the boat going down the Blue River;
- " 22 - arrival at Nankeu in the evening;
- " 23 - in the evening, departure for Canton - Hongkong, by train;
- " 26 - at noon, arrival at the Hongkong border.

From Canton to the Hongkong border we were searched three times; they took away from us all the money we had, giving to each of us, in exchange, the equivalent of about \$1.50.

Before the departure and during the trip from Mosimien to Hongkong, I made the following observations:

I know that the Lolos in the Mosimien valley submitted to the sharing of the land; but the independent Lolos of the Taleangsan region would not have it, and it was said that forcible measures were being considered.

The Communists were more indulgent with the Tibetans, and, as we were leaving, I heard that they were beginning to put pressure on the Tibetans to have them attend the lectures (the first step in the long Communist program).

I heard also that the Lamas of Tibet had placed the image of Mao Tse-tung among the idols in their temples and were showering praise on him every day, thus hoping to be left in peace.

On the motor-road Jagaan-Kangting I noted a heavy traffic of brand-new Russian military vehicles, which are quite fast. It is said that these vehicles carry supplies to the military storehouses in Tibet.

Before reaching Jagaan, along the road we saw our former proctor,

working in the

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working in the forced-labor gangs.

We noted thousands upon thousands of persons engaged in forced labor throughout China, building or repairing roads, bridges, etc.

In Jaganan (now the capital of Sikang), on October 12, at 5 p.m., in front of the police headquarters building, we saw one of the forced-labor gangs pass through the city. One of the men fell to the ground, exhausted; by orders from the escorting soldier, the others grabbed him by his coat and dragged him away, like a sack.....

Some 40 km. from Chengtu, an immense new military airfield was under construction.

Between Chungking and Chengtu a single-track railroad is being built. In October the work was half finished. We noted two foreigners and heard that they were Russians.

Two hours before reaching Chungking we went through a magnificent town, all newly built, with an excellent field for military training. The town seemed an immense aggregation of military barracks.

While we were embarking at Chungking, a Communist girl twice attempted to take her life by drowning; the other Communists saved her both times.

At Hankeou, as we were walking along one of the streets at 8 in the morning, we saw a dead man on the sidewalk, his head split wide open. No one paid any attention to him.

The Communist propaganda against America is incredible. Enormous placards are seen everywhere; usually they are in the form of cartoons showing contempt for, and casting insult upon, America while exalting the new China. On one of these placards I saw depicted an American soldier eating, like a real cannibal, the remains of a dead North Korean soldier, and a Chinese who was wrestling from his mouth a piece of the dead soldier's arm.....all that was left of the American meal!

In the interior

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In the interior of China the Communists are badly armed; large Mauser pistols, obsolete rifles, and here and there a few submachine guns, but not in great numbers. I cannot say whether they have other weapons ready in their arsenals. Often we saw soldiers and sentries carrying very clumsy hand grenades of the type with a wooden handle.

Near Chengtu-Chungking we met many men of the 8th Army; they traveled on foot and by mule-drawn wagons (three mules for each wagon). Their armaments seemed pitiful to us. Also, toward the South we saw a number of trucks (not Russian) of the 3rd Arm. I do not know what they were carrying or what their destination was.

Near Canton - Hongkong we noticed that each Communist was armed with two revolvers; a large one carried on the outside and a small one carried under the coat.

These are my few and sad recollections of Red China. And none of us will ever forget the intense, overwhelming joy we felt on leaving the Chinese sentries and being able to shake hands with the British ones.

In Mosimien we had read the famous book "I Chose Freedom!" There is truth in that book, absolute truth so far as the Communist ways are concerned. In regaining our freedom, we felt happy as little children and over come by an emotion which one experiences but few times in his life.

But an observation became timely at this time: the number 666.

One day, in Mosimien, one of the lepers offered me a cigarette; it was a new brand. In China there is no tobacco monopoly and a profusion of brands is found everywhere. And the Communists have copied all the brands of American cigarettes. Now, this new type was not given a name but a number: "666". We examined it closely; it was "666" without doubt, for the position of the writing and of the design on the package indicated that it could not be 999. I had, right then and there, the idea of taking a sample of it out of China; in fact, I gave this sample to the Custodian of the Lateran Museum.

It happens

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It happens that 666 is the fatal number of the Beast in the Apocalypse. Communism is convinced that it is the fatal apocalyptic beast and brags about it.

And verily, in the various police officers, in the various laws, in the cross-examinations, in the searches, the arbitrary confiscations of property, the taxes, the arrests, the executions, the tortures; in the political, religious, social and military strife, one can always detect a Being which one feels but cannot see; a Being which is personal in its impersonality and impersonal in the persons of its agents.

Anyone who has come across him knows him: it is He, it is "666"! It is the "Criminal" who rejoices in triumphing over everything good by his evil deeds!

T H E E N D

St. Francis Convent

Cittadella (Padua)

March 10, 1952

/s/ Fr. Candido Rechelli, OFM.

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